Ethical Collaboration in Health: An International Consensus Framework

Revised and Adopted 2025

A Consensus Framework established for ethical collaboration between diverse health stakeholders in support of high-quality patient care. This Consensus Framework and the accompanying resources are intended to serve as a toolkit for those associations, groups and alliances who wish to develop their own policies. It neither aims to be comprehensive nor does it constitute a single common policy of the organisations involved. The individual policies of the participating organisations set out each organisation's detailed commitments and offer more diverse and in-depth information and guidance.

First established in 2014, this Consensus Framework was revised in 2024 to coincide with its tenth anniversary and adopted in 2025.

Preamble

As developed and developing countries strive to address pressing health challenges in the complex and fast-evolving healthcare environment, collaboration between all partners is essential in ensuring proper delivery of the most appropriate care for patients worldwide.

In the 1980s international codes and guidelines were approved including the first IFPMA Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices in 1981 and the WHO Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion in 1985. Since then progress has been made to ensure appropriate interactions and ethical promotion of medicines globally, including through self-regulatory and voluntary mechanisms such as codes of conduct and principles. These highlight the need for health stakeholders to work together for the benefit of patients, while recognizing each other's professional role in the context of the healthcare value delivery chain and maintaining their professional independence.

There is an important link between health stakeholders in providing best solutions to patients' health needs and each partner has a unique role and responsibility in ensuring that patients receive the most appropriate care. Patients must be informed and empowered to, along with their caregivers, decide on the most appropriate treatment options for their individual health needs and to participate responsibly in use of health resources and managing their own health. In this respect, healthcare professionals must ensure that the treatment options they offer to patients are appropriate. In turn, the pharmaceutical industry has a duty to provide accurate, fair, and scientifically grounded information for their products, so that the responsible use of medicines can be facilitated.

The International Consensus Framework for Ethical Collaboration in Health is characterized by five overarching principles: Put Patients First; Support Ethical Research and Innovation; Ensure Independence and Ethical Conduct; Promote Transparency and Accountability; and Uphold Responsible Use of Health Data and Technology. The Consensus Framework outlines some of the key areas that should be considered by all partners to help guide ethical collaborations at the individual and organisational levels[1], and is based on the common elements within the documents listed in the Tools and Resources section of the Framework. It encompasses a shared commitment by partners to continually improve global health and ensure, in collaboration with other stakeholders, that all patients receive appropriate treatment. This Framework aims to complement the various national, regional and global codes and guidelines and serve as a model for similar joint initiatives between health stakeholders at the national level.

The Consensus Framework is currently supported by IAPO[2], ICN[3], IFPMA[4], FIP[5] WMA[6] and IHF[7] as all partners have a mutual interest in ensuring that the relationship between health stakeholders is based on ethical and responsible decision making. The Consensus Framework is a living document and is open to other key partners working in life-sciences and healthcare delivery, which are welcome to endorse it and comment upon it.

[1] The Joint Framework is based on the common elements within the documents listed in the Tools & Resources section.
[2] International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO)
[3] International Council of Nurses (ICN)
[4] International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA)
[5] International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)
[6] World Medical Association (WMA)
[7] International Hospital Federation (IHF)

Put Patients First

Patients are our priority.

For example:

1 **Optimal Care for All** – Working as partners, at both the individual and organization level, to ensure that collaboration between health stakeholders supports patients and their caregivers in making the best decision regarding their treatment. Partners will empower patients and ensure people-centered care.

2 **Partnerships** – All partners working in healthcare have a right and responsibility to collaborate to improve healthcare access and delivery. Establishing partnerships will aim to deliver greater patient benefits.

Support Ethical Research and Innovation

Partners encourage clinical and related research conducted to generate new knowledge about effective and appropriate use of health treatments.

For example:

3 **Clinical Research** – Continuing to advocate and support the principle that all human subject research must have a legitimate scientific purpose, aims to improve health outcomes, to identify best practices, and be ethically conducted, including that participants are appropriately informed as to the nature and purpose of the research.

4 **Objective Clinical Results** – Continuing to ensure that compensation for research is appropriate and does not compromise objective clinical results of the research.

Ensure Independence and Ethical Conduct

Interactions are at all times ethical, appropriate, and professional.

For example:

5 **Gifts** – Nothing should be offered or provided by a company in a manner or on conditions that would have an inappropriate influence. No financial benefit or benefit in kind should be sought, offered, provided or accepted in exchange for prescribing, recommending, dispensing or administering medicines.

6 **Sponsorship** – Continuing to advocate that the purpose and focus of all symposia, congresses, scientific or professional meetings (an "Event") partners should be to provide scientific or educational information. The primary purpose of an event must be to advance knowledge and all materials and content must be balanced and objective. All events must be held in an appropriate venue. Moderate and reasonable refreshments and/or meals incidental to the main purpose of the event can be provided to participants of the event.

7 **Affiliation** – Business arrangements and professional relationships between partners should not inappropriately influence their practice, compromise their professional integrity or their obligations to patients. Business arrangements and relationships should respect professional integrity and should be transparent.

Promote Transparency and Accountability

Partners support transparency and accountability in their individual and collaborative activities.

For example:

8 **Fees for Services** – Working together to ensure that all arrangements requiring financial compensation for services, such as consultancy or clinical research, have a legitimate purpose and a written contract or agreement in place in advance of the commencement of services. Remuneration for services rendered should not exceed that which is commensurate with the services provided.

9 **Clinical Research Transparency** – Continuing to support the premise that both the positive and negative outcomes of research evaluating medicines, other products and services should be disclosed. Clinical research in patients and related results should be transparent while respecting patient privacy.

10 **Health Data and technology** – Working together to realize the opportunities of health data and technology through embracing transparency and accountability in their development and use.

Uphold Responsible Use of Health Data and Technology

Partners embrace the responsible development and use of data and technology, including tools like artificial intelligence, that empower a healthy and thriving humanity.

For example:

11 **Autonomy, Control, and Empowerment** – Data should be collected and used in a manner that advances human health while respecting an individual's privacy, upholding human rights and safety, and honoring confidentiality. Measures should be taken to describe and make available when and how health data is used. Technologies utilizing health data, such as artificial intelligence, should be designed and deployed to empower humans while ensuring their control and oversight. This includes detailing how the technology is used, the goals and assumptions driving the technology, and the technology limitations. Protecting partners' professional autonomy as well as working together and within our respective communities to eliminate exclusion, inequities, and bias is essential as opportunities to advance human health are pursued.

12 **Stewardship** – All partners working to advance human health have access to data and technology, such as artificial intelligence, that requires careful stewardship to realize their benefits. This includes extending the utmost respect for all individuals whom the data represents, and that the technology is used to serve. It also prioritizes upholding quality through continuous validation (i.e., monitoring and testing) as well as the responsible use and sharing of data and technology.

13 **Collaboration** – Ongoing collaboration among the partners is vital as opportunities to develop and use health data and technology progresses. This will help ensure open communication and continuous feedback to foster alignment while improving patient care and public health.

Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism

Partners are encouraged to develop their own self-regulatory codes and principles for ethical collaboration and interactions and ensure their effective implementation. Systems to monitor and report breaches of the set standards should be established to support ethical practices and ensure accountability both at the institutional and individual levels. These may include, for example, public statements detailing collaborative agreements and external review mechanisms.

Tools and Resources

- WMA Declaration of Helsinki - Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (2024)
  https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki/
- IFPMA Decision-Making Framework Toolkit (2024)
  https://www.ifpma.org/blog/resources/our-ethos-in-action-decision-making-framework-toolkit/
- IAPO Healthcare Industry Partners Framework (2022)
  https://www.iapo.org.uk/healthcare-industry-partners
- IFPMA Artificial Intelligence Principles (2022)
  https://www.ifpma.org/blog/publications/ifpma-artificial-intelligence-principles/
- ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses (2021)
  https://www.icn.ch/resources/publications-and-reports/icn-code-ethics-nurses
- WMA Statement Concerning the Relationships b/w Physicians and Commercial Enterprises (2020)
  https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-statement-concerning-the-relationship-between-physicians-and-commercial-enterprises/
- IFPMA Code of Practice (2019)
  https://www.ifpma.org/subtopics/new-ifpma-code-of-practice-2019/
- IFPMA Ethoscope: Upholding Ethics and Business Integrity (2019)
  https://www.ifpma.org/areas-of-work/upholding-ethics-and-business-integrity/
- WMA Declaration of Taipei on Ethical Considerations Regarding Health Databases and Biobanks (2016)
  https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-taipei-on-ethical-considerations-regarding-health-databases-and-biobanks/
- FIP Statement on Professional Standards – Code of Ethics for Pharmacists (2014)
  https://www.fip.org/file/1586
- IAPO Organizational Values (2005)
  https://www.iapo.org.uk/our-values
- WHO Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion (1985)
  http://archives.who.int/tbs/promo/whozip08e.pdf
- FIP's BU-F1 FIP Guidance for Working with Sponsors and Funders (internal document)
  https://www.fip.org/index.php?page=login_members&redirect=fip-rules-of-procedures
- Joint FIP/WHO Guidelines on Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP): Standards for Quality of Pharmacy Services
  https://www.fip.org/file/5593

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